

**THE GANDHIAN BRIDGE
BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH**



RAGHAVAN IYER



CONCORD GROVE PRESS

INSTITUTE OF WORLD CULTURE



DECLARATION

To explore the classical and renaissance traditions of East and West and their continuing relevance to emerging modes and patterns of living

To renew the universal vision behind the American Dream through authentic affirmations of freedom, excellence and self-transcendence in an ever-evolving Republic of Conscience

To honour through appropriate observance the contributions of men and women of all ages to world culture

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To examine changing social structures in terms of the principle that a world culture is greater than the sum of its parts and to envision the conditions, prospects and possibilities of the world civilization of the future

To assist in the emergence of men and women of universal culture, capable of continuous growth in non-violence of mind, generosity of heart and harmony of soul

To promote universal brotherhood and to foster human fellowship among all races, nations and cultures

THE GANDHIAN BRIDGE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

NON-VIOLENT SOCIALISM, GLOBAL TRUSTEESHIP
AND RADICAL SELF-REGENERATION

INAUGURAL GANDHI MEMORIAL LECTURE

New Delhi, February 1, 1988
Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti

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FOREWORD

I am deeply honoured to be invited by the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti to deliver the inaugural Gandhi Memorial Lecture to mark the fortieth anniversary of the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation. I am most grateful to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Shri B.N. Pande, Governor of Orissa State, and Shri S.L. Kaushal, Director of the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, for this golden opportunity to consider the contemporary relevance of Gandhian thought and practice to our troubled times and to the future of the Indian Republic.

It is a sacred obligation that we all share in seeking, however belatedly and imperfectly, to expiate the collective crime of appalling *himsa* towards the apostle of non-violence, within and among the families, towns and cities in our spiritually impoverished global village. Mahatma Gandhi came amongst us to show the secret joy arising from the purity of *svadharma* in bridging our ideals and limitations, both in individual and social life. It is, therefore, fitting that we should seriously consider together the quintessential Gandhian message of non-violent socialism, global trusteeship and radical self-regeneration. This triple talisman is the priceless key to a joyous way of life wherein practice serves as precept, and contemplation is fused with action, so that the "socialism of the heart" may elevate all small beginnings into the sovereign philosophy of universal stewardship of the earth's spiritual and material resources. With malice towards none and charity to all, we may deftly transcend the polarities of Left and Right in partisan politics, all contrasts between the above and the below in time-bound creeds, religious and secular, as well as every degrading distinction of race and nation, language and province, caste and class, age and sex, origin and status, sect and schism, within the One Human Family.

The Gandhian bridge between heaven and earth, *nirvana* and *samsara*, *moksha* and *dharma*, *Ramarajya* and *Kali Yuga*, Mecca and the marketplace, the Kingdom of God and the City of Man, ancient wisdom and modern learning, is rooted in the cultural

and social soil of Aryavarta and extends, like a banyan tree, in myriad offshoots reaching upwards to the starry firmament, whilst providing refuge for the tired pilgrim on life's probationary journey. Like the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, it signifies the principle of continuity in all human endeavours with God and Nature, and also serves as a pathway leading from the darkness of delusion to the light of conscious immortality. It can help every man and woman, in every walk of life, to restore the dignity and divinity of the human pilgrimage by honouring the Spiritual Sun or *SAT* through honesty, conscientious work, gentleness and grace in our daily encounters with each other.

If we prove ourselves worthy, despite our past errors and delinquencies, to place our feet upon the sacred soil of Mother Earth, we may yet become fearless tillers in fields of service to one and all. In this way, perhaps, we may even dare to dream, like thrifty three-striped squirrels, and whisper in secret, that *Ramarajya* is close to our hearts, though it may require a long march into the future. This demands a radical rethinking of all our social institutions and individual modes of action, our priorities and preferences in the political sphere, our relations with all our neighbouring states, the vertical and horizontal distributions of authority and power within our multi-cultural federation, and our concrete contributions to the global civilization of the next millennium. May we all pool our collective wisdom and compassion, our varied skills and crafts, our spiritual, moral and social energies, in a vast, sacrificial undertaking that lights up the fires of creativity and altruistic action in every humble hearth and heart.

New Delhi
January 30, 1988

RAGHAVAN IYER

THE GANDHIAN BRIDGE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

Non-Violent Socialism, Global Trusteeship and Radical Self-Regeneration

When in the Mundakopanishad we find the description of the cosmic Person with fire as his head, the Sun and the Moon as his eyes, the quarters as his ears, the Vedas as his speech, air as his prana, the universe as his heart, the earth as his feet, we have in embryo a description of the vishvarupa [universal form] which later became the theme of the famous eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita on the transfigured personality of Krishna.

R. D. RANADE

*The Angels keep their ancient places; —
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.*

*But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; — and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.*

FRANCIS THOMPSON

*My heart has become capable of every form;
It is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba
And the tables for the Torah and the book of the Qur'an.
I follow the religion of Love: whatever way
Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.*

IBN AL-'ARABI

Selfless service is the secret of life.

MAHATMA GANDHI

I JACOB'S LADDER

Mahatma Gandhi held that all human beings are always responsible to themselves, the entire Family of Man and to God, or Truth (*SAT*), for their continual use of all the goods, gifts and talents that fall within their domain. This is necessarily true because of his basic assumption that Nature and Man are alike upheld, suffused and regenerated by the Divine. There is a luminous spark of divine intelligence in the action of each atom and in the eyes of every man, woman and child upon this earth. This is the enduring basis of effective self-regeneration at all levels — individual, social, national and global. We fully incarnate our latent divinity when we deliberately and joyously put our abilities and assets to practical use for the sake of the good of all. In this tangible sense, the finest exemplars of global trusteeship are those who treat all possessions as though they are sacred or priceless, beyond any worldly or monetary scale of valuation.

Thus, it is only through daily moral choices and the meritorious and sagacious employment of our limited resources that we sustain our inherited or acquired entitlements. For this very reason, the divisive notion and dangerous illusion of exclusive ownership is systematically misleading and, at worst, a specious and subtle form of violence. It connotes assertive rights or claims, and even privileged access, that far exceed the legitimate bounds of actual human need — even though protected by statutory law or social custom. It also obscures the generous bounty of Nature and the potential fecundity of human resourcefulness and innovation, which together can readily provide enough for all denizens of the earth, if only each person would hold in trust whatever he has to meet his essential needs, without profligate excess or any form of exploitation. This is the basic presupposition behind *sarvodaya*, non-violent socialism at its best, which is as old as the spiritual communism taught by Buddha and Christ.

Ancient Indian thought viewed the entire cosmos and all human souls as continually sustained by the principle of harmony (*rita*), the principle of sacrifice (*yajna*), and the principle of universal interdependence, solidarity and concord. This is enshrined in the Golden Rule which is found in all the major religions of mankind

and is mirrored in the codes and norms of all cultures at different stages of development. The Vedic chants portrayed heaven and earth as indissolubly linked through the mighty sacrificial ladder of being which is found in the Pythagorean philosophy and memorably conveyed in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Similarly, Jacob's celestial ladder of angels between heaven and earth signifies the indispensable linkage or Leibnizian continuity between the universal and the particular, the unconditional and the contextually concrete, the divine and the human, the Logos and the cosmos, the macrocosm and the microcosm. Jacob sensed, in his celebrated dream, that this vital connection provides a shining thread of hope for souls in distress. He also saw that it provides a helpful clue to action by binding together profound contemplation and the apt choice of available means, not because he claimed any supernatural wisdom or superhuman power, but only because he was content to remain an ardent seeker and a constant learner.

Philo Judaeus saw in Jacob a transparently good man who had gained the talismanic insight that everyone learns best by emulating noble exemplars instead of merely repeating the words of the wise without even trying to enact what they teach. Philo, who also saw the true statesman as a disguised soothsayer in the sense that he could interpret the deepest dreams of ordinary men and women, their irrepressible longings for the greater good, stated in his *De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia*:

It is characteristic of the learner that he listens to a voice and to words, for by these alone is he taught, but he who acquires the good through practice and not through teaching pays attention not to what is said but to those who say it, and imitates their life in its succession of blameless actions. Thus it is said in the case of Jacob, when he is sent to marry one of his kin, 'Jacob hearkened to his father and mother, and journeyed to Mesopotamia' (*Genesis* 28:7), not to their voice or words, for the practicer must be the imitator of a life, not the hearer of words, since the latter is characteristic of one who is being instructed, the former of one who struggles through to the end.*

* Philo of Alexandria (Philo Judaeus), *The Contemplative Life, The Giants and Selections*, David Winston, trans., Paulist Press (New York, 1981), p. 215.

Jacob was perhaps a *karma yogin* (or its rabbinical equivalent), who conscientiously sought to translate what he knew into the concrete discipline of moral conduct. He deeply cherished his vision of the celestial bridge between *theoria* and *praxis*, the invisible arch (or ark of salvation) linking the rarefied empyrean of scriptural ethics and the actual pathway each human being must trace and tread in his life on earth. To Jacob it was given to discern the divine ladder upon which the angels tread (depicted like a spinal column in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life), and to salute the old men who dream dreams as well as the young men who see visions (*Joel 2:28*). This is poignantly suggestive of the profound statement of Herzen, which contemporary detractors of *perestroika* and *glasnost* ignore at their peril, that political leaders do not change events in the world by rational demonstrations or by syllogisms, but rather by “dreaming the dreams of men”. No doubt, this is easier said than done, but it would be an élitist form of defeatism to abandon the attempt in a world bedevilled by obsolete isms and irrational ideologies, yet trembling on the brink of nuclear annihilation and global chaos. As Mikhail Gorbachev frankly admitted:

The restructuring doesn't come easily for us. We critically assess each step we are making, test ourselves by practical results, and keenly realize that what looks acceptable and sufficient today may be obsolete tomorrow. . . .

There is a great thirst for mutual understanding and mutual communication in the world. It is felt among politicians, it is gaining momentum among the intelligentsia, representatives of culture, and the public at large. . . .

The restructuring is a must for a world overflowing with nuclear weapons; for a world ridden with serious economic and ecological problems; for a world laden with poverty, backwardness and disease; for a human race now facing the urgent need of ensuring its own survival.

We are all students, and our teacher is life and time. . . . We want people of every country to enjoy prosperity, welfare and happiness. The road to this lies

through proceeding to a nuclear-free, non-violent world.*

Whilst Gandhi was doubtless closer in spirit to Jacob and Philo than to Herzen and Lenin, he would have concurred in the sentiments behind *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi saw himself essentially as a *karma yogin*, who, without claiming any special or supernatural wisdom, was unusually receptive in his readiness to honour remarkable men such as Naoroji, Gokhale and Rajchandra as rare models of probity worthy of emulation. He showed consistent fidelity to the paradigm of the self-governed Sage,† portrayed in eighteen *shlokas* which were daily chanted at his *ashram*. He took this classical model as the basis for assiduous self-study, ever seeking to correct himself whenever he saw that he had erred, especially when he made what he called, with playful hyperbole, “Himalayan blunders”. He strenuously maintained the hard-won awareness that sensitive leaders must always share the trials and travails of the human condition, that ubiquitous suffering is the common predicament of humanity, whilst all earthly pleasures and intellectual joys are ephemeral and deceptive.

Gandhi, like Gautama, did not try to escape the evident truth of human suffering through seeking mindless oblivion or neurotic distractions, nor did he choose to come to terms with it through compensatory spiritual ambition or conventional religious piety. Rejecting the route of cloistered monasticism, he pondered deeply and agonizingly upon the human condition, and sought to find the redemptive function and therapeutic meaning of human misery. Translating his painful insights into daily acts of *tapas* — self-chosen spiritual exercises and the repeated re-enactments of lifelong meditation in the midst of fervent social activity — he came to see the need for a continual rediscovery of the purpose of living by all those who reject the hypnosis of bourgeois society, with its sanctimonious hypocrisy and notorious ‘double standards’ for individual and public life.

Gautama Buddha had taught his disciples in the Sangha that

* Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, Harper and Row (New York, 1987), pp. 253-54.

† *The Bhagavad Gita*, Raghavan Iyer, ed., Concord Grove Press (Santa Barbara, 1985), pp. 84-90.

bodhichitta, the seed of enlightenment, may be found in the cleansed heart and controlled mind, and that it may be quickened by diligent practice of meditative altruism and honest self-examination of one's unconscious tendencies and hidden motives. As stressed in the later Mahayana schools of India, China and Tibet, *bodhichitta* can serve, like the Upanishadic *antaskarana* or mediating principle of intellection, as a reliable bridge between fleeting sense-experience and enduring spiritual aspiration, as an aid and stimulus to the ascent of consciousness to its highest possible elevation and even to the plane of *svasamvedana*, universal self-consciousness in the midst of *shunyata*, the voidness released through persistent philosophical negation.

Spiritual striving towards enlightenment can help to raise a ladder of contemplation along which the seeker may ascend and descend, participating in the worlds of eternity and time, perfecting one's sense of timing in the sphere of action. In most people, alas, the seed is not allowed to sprout or grow owing to chaotic and contradictory aims and desires, tinged by vain longings and delusive expectations, fantasies and fears, blocking any vibrant encounter with the realities of this world as well as any possibility of envisioning Jacob's ladder, "pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross". Gandhi's own spiritual conviction grew, with the ripening of age, that social reformers and non-violent revolutionaries must repeatedly cleanse their sight and remove all self-serving illusions by placing themselves squarely within the concrete context of mass suffering.

II SATYA AND AHIMSA

Gandhi contended that the earth has enough resources to provide for human need, but not human greed. He held, therefore, that every man, woman and child would eat adequately, clothe and shelter themselves comfortably, if there were a greater sharing of wealth in all parts of the world. Spurning equally the insatiable acquisitiveness of capitalism and the mechanistic materialism of communism, Gandhi condemned the shallow basis of modern civilization. In his notion of authentic civility, a sense of spiritual and social obligation is fused with a spontaneous sense of natural reciprocity. He further upheld the belief, steadily undermined

since the eighteenth century, that social institutions and political actions are by no means exempt from ethics. For social institutions are, he felt, the visible expression of moral values that mould the minds of individuals. It is therefore impossible to alter institutions without first affecting those values. Since modern civilization is one complex tissue of intertwined evils, no plan of partial and gradual reform from within the system can produce a lasting remedy. Gandhi sought to destroy systems, not persons; but he argued that the "soulless system" had to be destroyed without its reformers themselves becoming soulless.

The ethical potency of Gandhian thought was grounded in moral clarity and metaphysical simplicity. Without succumbing to either the illusion of infallibility or the delusion of indispensability, Gandhi sought to achieve a balance of intellect and intuition, warning his followers against both rationalization of weakness and erratic emotionalism. Again and again he found that the powerful combination of faith and experience, pure reason and daily application, was both self-transforming and infectious, and he felt that his own life vindicated its strength. Spurning all Manichaeian tendencies as snares, he deepened his conviction that God is formless and utterly beyond formulation. Individual integration and self-transcendence, he thought, can be achieved through considering and consolidating the close connection between truth and non-violence, *satya* and *ahimsa*. His unassailable belief that the conceptual foundation of his ethics was strong and sound — though he would refine his insights whenever his daily experience required him to do so — enabled him to find flexibility amid constancy.

Gandhi was a practical idealist. Untrammelled by the dead weight of convention, he was equally unconcerned with formal consistency. As a *karma yogin*, he had neither the time nor the aptitude for constructing a systematic philosophy. Instead, he discerned archetypal patterns and eternal possibilities for growth in the shifting conditions of human interaction. "Men are good," he wrote, "but they are poor victims making themselves miserable under the false belief that they are doing good."* To overcome

* M.K. Gandhi, "Letter to A.H. West", *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, K. Swaminathan, ed., Navajivan (Ahmedabad, 1958-1984), vol. 10, p. 127 (hereafter cited as

the false basis of thought and action, human beings must learn to question themselves and others, for, said Gandhi, "we are all bound to do what we feel is right". In translating his metaphysical assumptions into ethical principles, Gandhi always pointed to the basic impulses that underlie all action. Holding that there is a universal human nature which mirrors the Divine and may best be characterized as pure potential, he found it natural to use his own life as a crucible in which to test his principles and precepts.

Gandhi held that intelligent submission to the laws of cosmic interdependence and natural harmony would result in enduring fulfilment of one's true being. "Has an ocean drop an individuality of its own as apart from the ocean? Then a liberated soul has an individuality of its own." For Gandhi, this hoary metaphor enshrined the key to the metaphysical problem of the individual and the whole, and to what Plato formulated as the problem of the One and the many: "I do believe that complete annihilation of one's self-individuality, sensuality, personality — whatever you call it, is an absolute condition of perfect joy and peace."* However bestial in origin, man is human because he is potentially and essentially divine. Any pattern of thought, direction of energy or line of action hostile to that primordial unity leads eventually to frustration and misery; those acts in tune with it will initiate a happy, if sometimes unanticipated, outcome. Thus the individual who would be truly human must reduce himself to a zero in the eyes of the world. Then he can mirror infinitude in his heart and in his life.

Satyagraha and *sarvodaya* were Mahatma Gandhi's most significant and revolutionary contributions to contemporary political thought. The fundamental concepts of *satya* and *ahimsa*, truth and non-violence, can be found in the world's major religious and philosophical traditions; Gandhi's originality lay in the way he fused them in both theory and practice. His doctrines of *satyagraha* or non-violent resistance and *sarvodaya* or universal welfare were at once the logical corollaries of his fundamental premisses about human perfectibility, and the mature fruit of his

repeated experiments with political action and social reform. If absolute values can never be upheld on utilitarian grounds, adherence to them can none the less lead to desirable results which may be extolled in the language of expediency. Whilst speaking of *satya* in the language of faith, even in terms of total conviction, Gandhi often advocated *ahimsa* as a creed, regardless of results, though capable at times of producing concrete advantages.

Gandhi's concept of *satya*, with *ahimsa* as the means, gave rise to his complex doctrine of *satyagraha*; his concept of *ahimsa*, with *satya* as the common goal, enabled him to develop the doctrine of *sarvodaya* or non-violent socialism. Self-dependence, when rightly understood and embodied, becomes the crucial lever for non-violent social transformation. "Self-dependence is a necessary ideal so long as, and to the extent that it is an aid to one's self-respect and spiritual discipline."* It is not an end in itself, for those who become responsible through moral and spiritual renewal become the quickeners who can awaken a new impulse in the hidden depths of social life. Though he had no detailed plan for social transformation, Gandhi cherished the ideal of *Ramarajya* at the heart of his political vision, and firmly believed that *ahimsa* would eventually win global acceptance as a universal criterion of civilized life. This conviction, coupled with his faith in the magical power of millions striving in a common cause, gave him a clear, if intuitive, sense of direction.

Since the doctrine of *satyagraha* is a comprehensive social and political application of *satya* and *ahimsa*, it inevitably reflects the deontic logic of those metaphysical conceptions. On the one hand, *satyagraha* is an ethical imperative: one cannot justifiably claim to adhere to *ahimsa* and *a fortiori* to *satya* without making appropriate efforts to apply *satyagraha* to social conflicts. In this sense, *satyagraha* connotes 'truth-force', the luminous power of truth directed towards the promotion of social welfare. At the same time, however, because it confronts injustice and its attendant hostility through an effective appeal to conscience, *satyagraha* is a policy for action and a stimulus for social reform. In this sense, it is 'non-violent resistance'. These two dimensions of

CWMG); reprinted in *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Raghavan Iyer, ed., Clarendon (Oxford, 1986-1987), vol. 1, p. 16 (hereafter cited as MPWMG).

* M.K. Gandhi, "A Letter", CWMG, vol. 29, pp. 397-98; MPWMG, vol. 2, pp. 20-21.

* M.K. Gandhi, "Our Helplessness", *Young India*, Mar. 21, 1929; MPWMG, vol. 3, p. 228.

satyagraha are indivisible aspects of a single standpoint, for truth-force is a ceaseless witness to justice in its transcendental and immanent implications, and it must resist injustice whenever and wherever it occurs. Just as light by its presence delimits darkness and makes it evident, so too the *satyagrahi* by his suffering exposes injustice around him. And just as light dispels shadows, yet destroys nothing, so the *satyagrahi* dissolves injustice without harming its agents.

III THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

Gandhi envisaged the Constructive Programme as the indispensable positive component in the systematic practice of *satyagraha*. The Constructive Programme is the long-term prerequisite of a system of non-violent self-rule, without which political power or formal independence would prove to be a sham. The Constructive Programme includes individual and collective efforts on behalf of unity between diverse religious communities, the removal of social abuses such as untouchability, programmes of rural education and reconstruction, the decentralization of production and distribution, schemes for the improvement of health, sanitation and diet, the promotion of local handicrafts, and, in general, concerted work by all to promote the common good (*sarvodaya*):

Thirty-four years of continuous experience in experimenting in truth and non-violence have convinced me that non-violence cannot be sustained unless it is linked to body-labour and finds expression in our daily contacts with our neighbours. This is the Constructive Programme.*

Gandhi held that the Constructive Programme could not only generate a vast reservoir of non-violent energy, but could also serve as the basis of moral authority and even political power. He thought that much of the energy expended on behalf of external political ends was in fact wasted, and would be far better used by earnest *satyagrahis* in the immense project of social reform and public service. Whilst civil disobedience and other forms of

resistance could advance social amelioration, they could not establish the firm foundation for a general and continuous improvement of society or for the full realization of economic, social and moral freedom. While acknowledging the possibility of a division of labour for the sake of efficiency, Gandhi rejected any sharp separation between so-called political programmes and the Constructive Programme. It is, he thought, the judicious combination of constructive work and effective resistance that makes *satyagraha* radically subversive of all forms of élitist politics. He urged volunteers in the Constructive Programme to occupy themselves with that neglected work which brings neither fame nor power. Those resisters who courted imprisonment he valued less highly than those who simply surrendered themselves to constructive work. All political work fell for him within the Constructive Programme and its merit could be judged only in terms of lasting social transformation.

For Gandhi, short-term social reforms bring about changes which do not necessarily elevate the ethical tone of individuals or institutions and are, therefore, doomed to fail. *Satyagraha*, as a method of social change, attempts to raise the welfare of all and to initiate a radical alteration in people and governments. It must be judged without narrow temporal constraints. It is better to establish the foundation for a genuine and lasting good that may not be apparent for decades than to produce some dramatic change that will be eroded or subverted within a few years. Gandhi was therefore much less concerned with the quantity of people involved in *satyagraha* than with their true quality. He was convinced that if a single individual could become an exemplary *satyagrahi*, subtle changes would ultimately result and be more far-reaching than massive demonstrations based on impetuous enthusiasm and latent violence. Unlike the enduring alchemy of *satya* and *ahimsa*, the outcome of hypocrisy and violence is demoralizing and short-lived.

Owing to the necessary connection between individual and national *swaraj*, self-rule is incompatible with every form of exploitation. For Gandhi, common sense dictated that "when you demand *swaraj*, you do not want *swaraj* for yourself alone, but for

* M.K. Gandhi, "Ahimsa in Practice", *Harijan*, Jan. 27, 1940; *MPWMO*, vol. 3, p. 219.

your neighbour too".* *Swaraj* which is the hallmark of the free individual is the basis for collective *swaraj*, which in turn lays the foundation for national *swaraj*, which could, in its turn, in a world dedicated to *satya* and *ahimsa*, become the basis of global *swaraj*, a universal *Ramarajya* or Golden Age. Whilst there is a logical order of priority within the process of attaining *swaraj*, the inherent exploitation of dependence within a pyramidal hierarchy can be countered by the increased interdependence generated through *swadeshi*. Since self-rule suggests self-reliance, each unit in this expanding circle must stand on its own moral worth and lend strength to the others. The vampirical spectre of centralized government must give way to a decentralized confederation of village republics:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness.†

Gandhi viewed the struggle for independence, or national *swaraj*, from the broader perspective of ideal *swaraj*. He was hardly interested in independence for its own sake. Only through

* M.K. Gandhi, "Speech at Meeting of Village Workers, Nagpur", *Harijan*, Mar. 1, 1935; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 262.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Independence", *Harijan*, July 28, 1946; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 232.

national self-rule, he believed, could India become an active champion of international cooperation and global interdependence. Enslaving millions, the British Raj had prevented them from making a vital contribution to the universal *swaraj* of humanity. Gandhi flatly rejected any continuance of alien rule on the ground that it was demoralizing to the ruled. The oppressed had to endure indirect complicity with imperial iniquity, whilst seeing their own legitimate aspirations persistently frustrated. At the same time, however, Gandhi could not set great store by political independence alone; authentic *swaraj*, he felt, could originate only at the individual and village level. Just as individual *swaraj* involves a constant process of self-purification, so too national *swaraj* requires national self-purification — the removal of social abuses, the elimination of economic exploitation, the transcendence of religious differences, the inauguration of spiritual rebirth, the radical reconstruction of internal structures, and the comprehensive reform of an entire social system. Whilst castigating imperial rule, Gandhi also identified the weaknesses that Indians themselves would have to overcome in order to realize true *swaraj*.

IV SELF-RULE AND SELF-RELIANCE

Swadeshi, self-reliance, was for Gandhi an integral component of *swaraj*. Just as *satya* and *ahimsa* can be taken as absolute values, although *ahimsa* is logically dependent upon *satya*, so *swadeshi* follows logically from *swaraj*. *Swaraj* can be derived from *satya* (for self-rule is the expression of the intrinsic truth of the individual) and *swadeshi* can be derived from *ahimsa* (for complete non-violence requires full self-reliance). As a validating principle, *swaraj* is prior to *swadeshi*, though in daily practice *swadeshi* provides the measure of realized *swaraj*. If *swaraj* is the individual and national goal, *swadeshi* is collective strength. By 'self-reliance', Gandhi did not intend to suggest any romantic notion of 'rugged individualism', but rather an active force only partially captured in phrases like 'self-help' and 'self-dependence'. He preferred the English term 'self-reliance' because it suggests an effort to do what one can for oneself, whilst leaving plenty of room for mutual assistance. Ultimately, Gandhi could see no real distinction between ethical self-transformation and working for

the welfare of all.

The freedom of the *satyagrahi* is reflected in the collapse of an exaggerated contrast between selfishness and altruism, which is based upon *attavada*, 'the dire heresy of separateness'. In the selfless service (*anasakti yoga*) enjoined by the *Bhagavad Gita*, serving the needs of others is commensurate with nurturing the essential nature of the self. This religious standpoint can be translated into an economic programme: produce as much as possible for local consumption, and barter the rest for necessities. Gandhi was willing to go as far as needed to obtain essential goods, but no farther than was strictly required. Consumer economics not only encouraged mass poverty; it was also a social disease. Thus *swadeshi* could be rendered 'patriotism' in a political, and 'dharma' in a moral context. Fusing these contexts, Gandhi revealed new dimensions in both. "Swadeshi is service, and if we understand its nature we shall simultaneously benefit ourselves, our families, our country and the world."* In the protracted struggle for *swaraj*, Gandhi continually sought to give emphasis to the principle of *swadeshi* through his insistence upon the Constructive Programme, the revitalization of *panchayats*, the development of indigenous institutions of new education or *nai talim*, and the emergence of village industries through the use of the spinning wheel or *charkha*. Though willing to defend each of these programmes on its own merits, he consistently held that Indian *swaraj* could have no lasting foundation without the systematic application of *swadeshi*.

As with the principle of non-violence, each proposed application of *swadeshi* should be examined in relation to the principle of *satya* or truth. Such judgements are amenable to self-correction as long as one is ready to engage in daily self-examination and mental purgation. Specific means of attaining *swadeshi* must likewise be assessed in terms of their fidelity to the ideal of *swaraj*, authentic freedom. The pursuit of *swaraj* through *swadeshi*, like the pursuit of *satya* through *ahimsa*, is a matter of individual judgement based upon appeals to conscience and experience. The attainment of *swaraj* through *swadeshi* cannot come about if some

areas of life are considered irrelevant. Gandhi rejected the division of life into separate and discrete compartments, and continually sought open-textured approaches that honoured the interdependence of different modes and means to a single long-term goal.

From the twenties until his death in 1948, Gandhi gradually shifted the emphasis of his political endeavours from non-violent resistance to constructive schemes for the social good. For him, non-violent resistance (*satyagraha*) and the Constructive Programme — a concrete embodiment of *sarvodaya* — were logical corollaries of the same philosophical perspective. Non-violent resistance, however, aimed to set right entrenched abuses or to abolish some patently unfair law or practice. But persisting non-cooperation with perceived evils cannot by itself create a socialist society. Gandhi's position was not wholly like Thoreau's and he could readily concede the importance, stressed by T.H. Green, of invoking the public interest (*sarvodaya*). He could also concur that the dictates of individual conscience, if genuine, would culminate in social action that would arouse and appeal to the conscience of others. But he could not make the enlightened individual's duty to follow his conscience dependent upon social recognition or public approbation.

Gandhi's continual concern was always with duties rather than with rights; in fact, there is no concept of 'rights' as such in Indian political thought. Further, his lifelong emphasis on *ahimsa* as the sole means to be used in the vindication of *satya* required him to hold that the courageous resistance to injustice, properly conducted, could not lead to general anarchy. Thus Gandhi differed from Thoreau chiefly in that his language and his emphasis were less anarchistic, but he distinctly differed from T.H. Green (whom he never read) in his own moral conception and political justification of the right of resistance to the State.* Cessation of persistent wrongdoing is a necessary prerequisite for, but is hardly identical with, positive social welfare. The Constructive Programme did not rule out non-violent resistance or non-cooperation, but it simply focussed upon constructive ways of rebuilding a demoralized society. It sought to transform a servile

* M.K. Gandhi, "Swadeshi v. Foreign", *Navajivan*, June 19, 1927; *MPWMC*, vol. 3, p. 365.

* Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press (New York, 1973, 1978); second edition: Concord Grove Press (Santa Barbara, 1983), pp. 268-69.

nation habituated to sectional loyalties and social apathy into a fearless community of mutual service and sacrifice, in which every responsible individual readily identified with others, especially the poor and the meek.

By instilling a lofty conception of labour, Gandhi sought to uplift the whole of society, whilst encouraging self-sufficiency in each sector and region. If civil disobedience and non-violent resistance could arouse the conscience of others, the Constructive Programme could channel that awakened sensitivity in beneficial ways. Within the Indian context, this meant nurturing communal unity, abolishing untouchability, and fostering adult education and systematic improvement of villages. It meant uplifting the peasants and developing non-violent labour unions, working towards economic and social equality, promoting cottage and small-scale industries as a means for decentralizing economic production and distribution, and eradicating a wide variety of social evils.

The intense wish to ameliorate depressing conditions was not in itself sufficient to effect a real change for the better. He wrote to a village worker in 1925:

It is only recently that we thought of going into the villages. At first, we wanted things from the village people. It is only now that we are going to the villages in order to give the people something. How can we expect to win their confidence in such a short time? . . . We have to win back our honoured place among the village people, and will get nothing through impatience. Some persons serve their own interests under the guise of service. What other means do the village people have, except experience, to distinguish between such persons and genuine workers? Public workers, therefore, must cultivate patience, forbearance, selflessness and such other virtues. The masses can have no other knowledge but experience to guide them.*

* M.K. Gandhi, "Who is to Blame?", *Navajivan*, June 28, 1925; *MPWNG*, vol. 3, pp. 533-34.

V SOCIALISM FROM BELOW ABOVE

Gandhi remained sceptical of imposing any social reformation from the top, and he parted company with ideological and State socialists on this crucial point. To them, his bold attempts at non-violent resistance at least had the merit of being national in scope even when local in origin, but the Constructive Programme seemed to them like pouring water through a sieve into local villages and small community groups. Gandhi respected innate intelligence and acquired scholarship, but he felt that urban intellectuals could be useful as creative leaders in social reform only when they identified and merged themselves with the rural masses. They could not, as Marx thought, conveniently guide the proletariat from revolutionary cloisters and then be drawn along by the mass fervour they had helped to kindle. Rather, they could arouse the spirit of non-violent revolution only by living in villages and working conscientiously to improve the lot of the peasantry. Replying to a critic who maintained a Marxian perspective on the strategic role of intellectuals in the social revolution, Gandhi said:

Whereas you have before your mind's eye that microscopic minority, the educated Indian, I have before my mind's eye the lowliest illiterate Indian living outside the railway beat. Important as the former class undoubtedly is, it has no importance in my estimation except in terms of the latter and for the sake of the latter. The educated class can justify its existence only if it is willing to sacrifice itself for the mass.*

Revolution has to be from the bottom up if it is to be non-violent, successful and permanent. Neither panaceas in the form of ingenious permutations of stable elements in the social structure nor the wholesale reassignment of political roles and offices can make any substantial difference to the human situation. If disgruntled intellectuals genuinely wished to help, they must not merely preach to the multitudes and encourage incendiary reactions while they themselves remain aloof from the muddy arena of conflict. Instead, they must merge with the masses of the

* M.K. Gandhi, "Letter to Captain J.W. Petavel", SN 12648, Sabarmati Sangrahalaya, Ahmedabad; *MPWNG*, vol. 3, p. 534.

disinherited and demonstrate collective uplift through their own heroic labours. Thus Gandhi divorced sattvic or noetic politics from the turba of ideological froth. Fusing the political art with the gospel of service to the community, he restored to contemporary politics the classical concern with the common good, the *agathon* or *sarvodaya*. He was firmly convinced that the persuasion of helping hands would generate a more lasting, if more gradual, revolution than ideological pronouncements could possibly achieve:

The harder the task, the fewer willing workers will there be. . . . But understanding workers, when they observe the paucity of volunteers, will become more devoted to their work and make greater sacrifices. If they do so, the number of workers will increase again. There is no exception to this law.*

If Gandhi had little faith in the presumed capacity of modern institutions to ameliorate human misery and mass deprivation, he was also fully aware that arduous work in villages would not miraculously transform most political workers. Just as he had employed the diverse methods of *satyagraha* on a national scale, so too he found that they could be utilized on a micro-level to preserve cohesiveness and direction amongst voluntary workers in the Constructive Programme. When critics wrote to him of the manifold ways in which dedicated workers seemed to succumb to the enticements of power, he advised appropriate forms of non-cooperation. But, he warned,

During my long experience, I also noticed that those who complain of others being ambitious of holding power are no less ambitious themselves, and when it is a question of distinguishing between half a dozen and six, it becomes a thankless task.†

Workers in villages would not miraculously escape the pervasive ills which infect the élitist advocates of State socialism, but cultivating social reform at the local level could afford the best conceivable opportunities for holding them in check and even

* M.K. Gandhi, "Letter to Dahmibehn Patel", GN 9206, Gandhi Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 535.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Some Important Questions", *Harjan*, Mar. 2, 1947; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 174.

eradicating them. At least, the tendency to leap to hastily drawn conclusions regarding what could and could not be accomplished would be moderated. Proclivities arising from the weaker side of human nature could be mitigated. Tangible improvements should not be overlooked because the 'big picture' failed to enthuse volunteers, whilst the intangible transformation of human consciousness must not be missed out owing to the excessive psychological generalizations of grandiose theories. Workers should refine and renew their activities, not on the basis of abstract models, but out of their well-earned experience. In 1947 Gandhi spoke plainly to a large gathering of socialists on the eve of Indian independence:

No doubt the transfer of power will remove many obstacles. But we shall have to do solid work among the people. Since you look upon me as an adviser and seek my advice of your own free will, I have only one advice to give, and that is that, if you wish to establish socialism, there is only one way in which it can be done: go and live among the poor in the villages, live as they live, be one with the village people, work for eight hours daily, use only village-made goods and articles even in your personal lives, remove illiteracy among the village people, eradicate untouchability and uplift the women.

I will even go so far as to suggest that you should establish such a living bond with the village people that, if anyone amongst you is unmarried and wishes to marry, he or she should choose a partner from among the village girls or boys. If anyone else seeks your advice on this subject, give him or her, too, the same advice. Make your life an ideal one in this way; when the people see your transparent lives every minute of the day as clearly as we see pictures on a screen, their influence will be felt throughout the country and reform its life.*

This is a bold vision, but one which Gandhi believed could be embodied with increasing approximation and one which would remain an index of progress in social reform.

* M.K. Gandhi, "Talk with Socialists", *Bihar Pachhi Dilhi*, pp. 14-19; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 543.

VI POLITICAL POWER AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Except for strict adherence to non-violence as a principle and a policy at all times, Gandhi did not dispute the socialist and communist ideals of any society in which basic economic, social and political equity supported a healthy spirit of equality and fraternity amongst all citizens. He doubted that the centralized State could serve these ends unless it had actually arisen from a people already dedicated to them. Like Marx, he thought that a people so dedicated would not need the State in its contemporary form, since much of its socio-political apparatus would have become irrelevant. The social transformation of a nation could not be achieved by mere exhortation, if for no other reason than that social action and political authority cannot be wholly disentangled. Gandhi was deeply convinced that political power could be brought to bear on corrupt institutionalized practices which subvert social and economic ends, but just as his radical ideas of social and economic reform require that these arenas be purified and understood in a new light, politics too must be purified and understood anew. When criticized for his political action, he once responded, "Is not politics too a part of *dharma*?"* but he thought of political power — like all power — as a means and not an end:

Political power, in my opinion, cannot be our ultimate aim. It is one of the means used by men for their all-round advancement. The power to control national life through national representatives is called political power. Representatives will become unnecessary if the national life becomes so perfect as to be self-controlled. . . . That is why Thoreau has said in his classic statement that that government is the best which governs the least. †

Recognizing that this was a distant ideal, Gandhi none the less believed that only the loftiest ideal could effectively motivate the advancement of a people. He was closer to Marx than to Weber in

* M.K. Gandhi, "A Letter", *Bihar Pachhi Dilhi*, p. 350; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 548.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Enlightened Anarchy — A Political Ideal", *Sarvodaya*, Jan. 1939; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 602.

his insistence upon an open-textured vision of human nature, a fundamental standpoint which allowed him to point to social perfectibility without the arbitrary restraint of predetermined time limits on its realization. In practice, he was always ready to settle for much less at any given time, provided it did not foreclose further progress or actually negate the ideal. Gandhi's entertaining dialogues with socialists and communists, as well as his ready application of their basic vocabulary to much of his political work, reveal a deep insight into the methodology of social transformation. In addition to the need for a bold vision, which all social reformers accept, and the principle and policy of non-violence, which many socialists and all traditional communists would reject, Gandhi discerned a number of requirements for permanent social reform which cannot be ignored without peril by reformers of any persuasion.

First of all, Gandhi comprehended that the key to lasting social transformation lay in securing constructive change in the social and economic infrastructure of a nation. He knew that governments and policies pass away and are forgotten, whilst the roots of the social structure remain firm if nurtured in the villages and amongst the people. For Gandhi, India had to revitalize these roots precisely because myriad villages were allowed to decline steadily from the seventeenth century under colonial rule. Drained of their traditional resources, they were promised very little of the tempting goods of 'modern civilization' and given much less. What others bemoaned as a horrendous lack, Gandhi saw as a distinct advantage. The villages had been more abandoned than altered, and so he saw the possibility of revitalizing them along constructive lines even whilst encouraging social democracy and self-reliance, ideas that depend upon character, not capital.

Secondly, a critical factor in radically renewing the entire infrastructure, but also valuable at every level, was the necessity for both individual and collective *yajna* or sacrifice. No nation can expect to reconstitute itself on an equitable basis without its people giving up at least those things necessarily dependent on inequities. Yet, merely to divest portions of the population of cherished privileges or properties is to provoke class war. Therefore, Gandhi saw that the potent ideal of voluntary sacrifice for a larger common good had to become mandatory common

sense within the social system and of exemplary nobility in the eyes of peers. If trusteeship is to bring about social reform without bitter conflict, a broad conception of stewardship must command the allegiance of leaders and the people alike. Socialist and communist systems have already demonstrated the awesome capacity of the masses to sacrifice in vain for a vague ideological promise of a glorious future. Gandhi uncompromisingly insisted that those who would be responsible leaders of a socialist society must lead the way in making tangible sacrifices. Failure to do this voided all claims to wisdom, insight and credibility. Sacrificing freely amidst the people demonstrated minimal and authentic understanding of equity and equality, and every honest effort could foster a contagious change in all arenas of society.

Thirdly, and closely related to the need for the sacrificial spirit, was Gandhi's own continual realization in his intensely active political life that reformers need the very reforms they sought for others. For Gandhi, there were not two species of human being — those who needed reform in a socio-economic context and those who advocated reform and yet had marvellously remained untouched by the societies in which they lived. If modern civilization is a disease — as Gandhi believed — all are more or less infected by the virus. Though he acknowledged the rich resources of some individuals in wisdom and knowledge, and even in experience, he held to the uncompromising equality of all in the need to transform thinking, motivation and modes of action. Though this powerful realization came from a penetrating insight into the complexities of human nature and social structures, Gandhi expressed it in Euclidean terms: the ideal society is not a closed circle, but an open one in which all its citizens work towards extending the horizons of human perfectibility, knowing that they can always do much better, whilst no one is in a position to claim seriously that he can in no way do better.

Fourthly, whilst Gandhi cherished the grand vision of social possibility offered by optimistic socialists and communists, and indeed expressed a distinct vision of his own that they found daring in its long-term faith in the human race, he could not concede the practicability of magisterial demands for total reformation *all at once*. Gandhi's embryonic plan for social transformation is properly called revolutionary not in respect to

time but rather to its texture. The revolution he projected must be total but gradual. It is essential to nurture the revolution by degrees, however vast the whole picture might be. Gandhi felt that many self-styled revolutionaries were not really committed to a transformation they would not live to see. The willingness to labour patiently for incremental gains towards an end which one would not live to share was for Gandhi part of the sacrifice required of all, especially those who would lead.

Fifthly, the Constructive Programme was designed not only to disseminate Gandhi's basic principles but also to ensure that a variety of shifting opportunities could be taken to secure modest successes wherever possible. A mere succession of violent thrusts at the existing social structure is not acceptable. Gandhi preferred modest gains, each of which stood a reasonable chance of enduring. Leaving the dramatic action of demolishing the old social structure to those who preferred what he saw as misguided activity, he sought to build a new edifice brick by brick. The Constructive Programme could slowly build upon every success whilst leaving the future open to bold experimentation, in which there are invariably errors, without threatening to lose the gains already made. The Constructive Programme drew its hidden inspiration from the hoary concept of trusteeship which could sustain both a narrower economic interpretation and a broader social application. If, as Gandhi maintained, labour is as much social capital as metal, everyone capable of working should consider himself or herself an ethical trustee, even if one's own sphere of effective action is no larger than the village or the home.

VII TRUSTEESHIP AND SARVODAYA

Since each facet of the Constructive Programme is related directly to trusteeship, the various programmes are coherently if loosely associated with one another. Such an overarching conception allows for efficient coordination of different endeavours, whilst permitting each line of action to develop on its own and at its own pace. At the same time, since the whole Constructive Programme is based on trusteeship as a shared ideal, it can proceed even when there is varying resistance to the effective realization of the ideal. The scope and simplicity of the

Constructive Programme was a source of annoyance to those socialists who tended to look for detailed plans and quantifiable criteria of accomplishment. Gandhi, however, thought that its unique virtue lay in its generality, both because it avoided the psychological defeatism which readily emerges when rigid objectives are not met, and because it gave ample recognition to the intangible and unquantifiable elements of human progress.

When an inflexible calendar for social reform is established, the repeated failure to meet its publicized deadlines tends to nurture the suppressed tendency to show violence of various sorts as the only decisive means to secure the desired ends. The Constructive Programme, with its almost unlimited plasticity, embodies the realistic perspective required for social revolution as well as specific criteria by which to measure what is in fact possible.

If class revolution fails to alter the prevailing state of society, however much it may elevate the formerly oppressed and denigrate the overthrown masters, non-violent conversion will fail to sustain a viable political and economic system without a *modus operandi* which merges the requirements of social reform with those of economic improvement. This core method was, for Gandhi, the ethical ideal of trusteeship, a powerful concept which, if put into practice, could avert potential class conflict, link fundamental social reform with economic stability, and utilize every existing talent and creative skill. Its intrinsic power to include all classes and make them contribute constructively to an emerging social order attracted Gandhi, who was strongly convinced that its honest and consistent application could demonstrate the practicability of the principle of non-violent social reformation.

Rejecting every form of exploitation and viewing all human beings as equal sacrificers for the welfare of all, Gandhi sought to lay the basis for a redistribution of wealth that would be consistent with the sacrificial moral order (*rita*) of the cosmos. However inequitable the distribution of material and mental resources among human beings, he believed that men and women could act as trustees, rather than as owners, of their resources, and could thus consider themselves as the partners of all their fellows in society. He had no objection to a large measure of society's wealth flowing through the hands of individuals, but he warned that this involved a moral temptation and a spiritual trial which

would require a deliberate vow of non-possession and a self-conscious adoption of the principle of trusteeship. He advised every individual to weigh his circumstances in the court of conscience according to the criteria of truth and non-violence and the obligations of *sarvodaya*. Such a radical redefinition of both the means and the ends of production could serve as the basis of a fundamental reform of society.

Sarvodaya was predicated upon the diffusion of power, yoked to a firm recognition of the moral priority of social virtue over sectional interest. Competition must make way for concord. To be effective, this shift in social and political perspective must be understood as a spiritual requirement in a civilized world, a revolutionary enterprise which would eventually benefit all humanity. As a macrocosm of the individual seeker, society as a whole must come to renounce everything not supported by the concept of mutual responsibility. In practical terms, therefore, pioneering witnesses to truth and non-violence are obliged to teach through example the necessity of shifting the axis of social life from an aggressive emphasis on rights to an active concern with obligations. They must exemplify a spirit of fellowship that has nothing to do with levelling up or down, since each person's *dharma* is unique to himself. They must also renounce the material and psychological exploitation that causes poverty. The votaries of *sarvodaya* need not repudiate the innovativeness of the technological age, but they must shun soulless mechanization and trivial gadgetry.

The production, preservation and distribution of goods may be likened to the circulation of blood in the body. Generally, "the concentration of blood at one spot is harmful to the body and, similarly, concentration of wealth at any one place proves to be the nation's undoing".* Employing this organic metaphor, Gandhi envisaged a radical reformulation of the elusive conception of collective welfare. Unlike utilitarians, he was unwilling to accept the principle of the greatest good of the greatest number. Instead, he pleaded for a more synergistic conception of collective welfare, wherein the suffering of the least and the lowest inevitably

* M.K. Gandhi, "*Sarvodaya*", *Indian Opinion*, June 20, 1908; *MPW/MG*, vol. 3, p. 421.

interacts with the supposed well-being of the most prosperous so as to negate completely the alleged social value of such prosperity. He saw collective social welfare as a chain no stronger than its weakest link. At the same time, he held that the contributions of individuals to social welfare were not restricted in principle by their intellectual, economic, social or political status, although, to be sure, the possession of enough resources could help individuals move beyond greed and engage in service. Gandhi favoured the development of a true science of economics, based upon the principle of *sarvodaya* and directed towards an intelligent regulation of the flow of wealth. He defined the health of this flow in terms of justice, and proposed as a criterion for justice in economic exchange the principle that "a just wage for a worker will be that which will secure him the same labour, when he needs it, as he has put in for us today".*

Gandhi sensed that all our resources and possessions, at any level, are not merely fragments of the Divine but are also inherently mortal and mutable. The Divine in its active aspect is ceaselessly creative and ever fluid in form. By analogy, human needs and material circumstances alter even while cultural patterns and social customs purport to maintain temporal continuity through established traditions. Ownership, from this standpoint, is truly a costly and illusory attempt to ensure permanency and succession. It gives birth to unwarranted attachments and insupportable expectations. The selfish grasping for possessions of any kind not only violates the deeper purposes of our human odyssey but eventually breeds possessiveness and greed, exploitation and revenge. This appalling moral malaise leads to inordinate self-assertion and self-projection which can only yield distrust, sorrow and "loss of all". But when we attain the sacred mental posture of the trustee who regards all possessions as held in trust for the good of all, we can progressively approach the high spiritual state of mental renunciation. We can, in the Upanishadic phrase, "renounce and enjoy". It is only when we voluntarily relinquish our unnatural claims and consecrate ourselves to a higher purpose that we can

* M.K. Gandhi, "*Sarvodaya*", *Indian Opinion*, July 4, 1908; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 426.

freely enjoy what we have.* Thus, self-satisfaction is a natural outcome of a generous perspective and a greater purity of heart. It is truly a function of the harmonious cultivation of our spiritual, mental and material resources. In Gandhian terms, guilt-free enjoyment is inseparable from ethical probity. The real issue, then, is not how much or how little we possess in the way of property or talent, but the reasons and motives behind their allocations and uses.

VIII LEVELS OF TRUSTEESHIP

Gandhi approached the concept of trusteeship at four different levels. *First of all*, trusteeship, as the sole universalizable means of continuously redistributing wealth, could be seen as a corollary of the principle of non-violence and could simultaneously assure the generation and intelligent use of wealth:

No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method the wrongdoer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrong. For, either through Non-violent Non-co-operation he is made to see his error, or he finds himself completely isolated.†

Even if wealth could be coercively redistributed, the resulting greed and inexperience on the part of many and the resentment on the part of the dispossessed would lead to economic instability and rapid decline. More likely than not, it would lead to class war, anomic violence and widespread self-alienation. Trusteeship, however, encourages owners to see themselves as vigilant trustees of their accumulated wealth for the larger community, without threatening them.

Secondly, Gandhi's practical psychological intuition allowed him to see that fear would prevent other means of economic distribution from succeeding in the long run. A fundamental change in the concepts of activity and courage is needed to overcome passivity and cowardice. Courage must be detached from violence, and creativity must be dislodged from the self-

* M.K. Gandhi, "Speech at Prayer Meeting", *Hindustan Times*, Apr. 16, 1946; *MPWMG*, vol. 2, pp. 638-39.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Theory of 'Trusteeship'", *Harjan*, Dec. 16, 1939.

protective formulations of entrenched élites. This involves rooting new notions of noetic activity which are creative, playful and tolerant, and new notions of moral courage which are heroic, magnanimous and civil, in a search for universal self-transcendence. An individual must feel, both abstractly and concretely, a secure sense of joyous eros in fellowship, and a positive sense of solidarity with hapless human beings everywhere. He must feel at one with the victims of incomplete revolutions, with the understandably impatient and occasionally mistaken pioneers of great revolutions, and even more with those willing to defy every presumptuous criterion and form of authority which trespasses upon individuality.

The fearful man tyrannizes others: forced redistribution would bring fearful responses from owners, who would see their lives and futures threatened, and fearful masses would deal with excess wealth incompetently. For Gandhi, the ever-present possibility of social change must be approached from a position of truth and courage, whereas fear is weakness which leads to violence. Strength should not be mistaken for the modalities of violence, which are instruments of fear and always lead to varying degrees of self-destruction. Since strength rests on human dignity and respect, workers must approach exploitative capitalists from a position of self-respect based on the capital of labour, for "labour is as much capital as metal".* To abolish fear and even failure itself requires a fundamental change in the social structure. The feasibility of this social transformation does not lie in denying the judgements of others, but rather in regarding them as partially relevant though in no sense compelling. Individuals can commit themselves to increasing their own capacity for self-transcendence of external criteria of differentiation, and thereby attain liberation from the self-perpetuating iniquities and horrors of the System:

Therefore, workers, instead of regarding themselves as enemies of the rich, or regarding the rich as their natural enemies, should hold their labour in trust for those who are in need of it. This they can do only when, instead of feeling so utterly helpless as they do,

* M.K. Gandhi, "Letter to B. Srirangasayi", *The Hindu*, Oct. 11, 1934; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 510.

they realize their importance in human economy and shed their fear or distrust of the rich. Fear and distrust are twin sisters born of weakness. When labour realizes its strength it won't need to use any force against moneyed people. It will simply command their attention and respect.*

Gandhi discerned the critical role acceptability plays in legitimating a social order, and distinguished between a people's tacit acceptance and active dislike of an economic regime. So long as any society finds its socio-economic system acceptable, that system will stand even if a militant minority detests it. But should a significant number of individuals find it unacceptable, it is shaken to its foundations, regardless of the complacency of privileged élites.

Thirdly, Gandhi contended that the idea of trusteeship could be put into practice non-violently, because it could be instituted by degrees. When asked if such 'trustees'—individuals who possessed wealth and yet saw themselves as stewards for society—could be found in India in his day, he rejected the question as strictly irrelevant to the theory, which can only be evaluated by extensive testing over time:

At this point I may be asked as to how many trustees of this type one can really find. As a matter of fact, such a question should not arise at all. It is not directly related to our theory. There may be just one such trustee or there may be none at all. Why should we worry about it? We should have faith that we can, without violence or with so little violence that it can hardly be called violence, create such a feeling among the rich. We should act in that faith. That is sufficient for us. We should demonstrate through our endeavour that we can end economic disparity with the help of non-violence. Only those who have no faith in non-violence can ask how many trustees of this kind can be found.†

* Ibid.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Answers to Questions at Gandhi Seva Sangh Meeting, Brindaban — II", *Gandhi Seva Sanghke Panchama Varshik Adhiveshan (Brindaban, Bihar) ka Vivaran*, pp. 50-59; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 512.

Gandhi knew that he sought the widespread realization of a forgotten ideal, but he repudiated the conventional notion that an experiment is unworthy to be tried simply because it stems from an exacting ideal. Even if one argued that trusteeship was doomed to failure, it ran no greater risk than the conventional social proposals of the day. Committed to principles but flexible in policies, Gandhi saw no reason to neglect ideals and to institute social reforms from a defeatist standpoint. Such an approach only guaranteed that structural faults would be built into the new social order. Rather, he emphasized, it is better to move towards the ideal and make appropriate adjustments necessitated by the specific failures encountered in attempting to reach it. In so doing, principles would remain uncompromised and the possibility of improvement would always remain, whereas in a system which assumes cupidity and corruption in human nature, nothing encourages their eradication.

Gandhi not only had faith that it was possible for human beings to become trustees of their resources for the sake of all, but also that many in fact were already and had always been trustees. They are the preservers of culture and tradition, who show their ethical stance through countless daily acts of graciousness and concern for others. To treat man as man requires not so much the acceptance of the equal potentialities of all men, let alone their infinite possibilities, but rather the acceptance of the unknown potentialities of all human beings. Given scarce resources, the limits of productivity and of taxable income, there are definitely limits to what the State can do, but is there any reason why voluntary associations should not be entrusted with the task of extending the avenues of opportunity available to the disinherited? The socialist could argue that by an indefinite extension of opportunities (not always requiring State action) and by changing not only the structure but the entire ethos and moral tone of society, new social values could slowly emerge and usher in an era in which men show mutual respect which is not based on skills and promotions, rank and status.

The minimal goal of basic economic equity is easily stated, yet it is the fundamental first stage for the uplift of the whole:

Everybody should be able to get sufficient work to make the two ends meet. And, this ideal can be

universally realized only if the means of production of elementary necessities of life remain under the control of the masses. These should be freely available to all as God's air and water are, or ought to be; they should not be made a vehicle of traffic for the exploitation of others. Their monopolization by any country, nation or groups of persons would be unjust. The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of the destitution that we witness to-day, not only in this unhappy land, but other parts of the world, too.*

The principle of trusteeship in its application to the equitable distribution of wealth, as well as to the non-violent socialist reformation it underpins, is practicable because it does not require everyone to undertake it all at once. Unlike most socialists who reason that they must seize the power of the State before instituting effective reforms, Gandhi held that enlightened individuals could initiate the process of divesting themselves of what is unnecessary while becoming true trustees of their own possessions:

It is perfectly possible for an individual to adopt this way of life without having to wait for others to do so. And if an individual can observe a certain rule of conduct, it follows that a group of individuals can do likewise. It is necessary for me to emphasize the fact that no one need wait for anyone else in order to adopt a right course. Men generally hesitate to make a beginning, if they feel that the objective cannot be had in its entirety. Such an attitude of mind is in reality a bar to progress.†

Once the barrier in consciousness is broken, the principle of trusteeship can be made to work by letting go of the demand for a mechanically equal distribution, something Gandhi doubted could ever be realized. Instead, he held to the revolutionary ideal of *equitable* distribution, which would not only be possible but necessary in the non-violent socialist State.

* M.K. Gandhi, "Economic Constitution of India", *Young India*, Nov. 15, 1928.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Equal Distribution", *Harjan*, Aug. 25, 1940; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 506.

Should attempts to encourage the abandonment of exploitation through misappropriation of the means of production fail, trusteeship could be made to work through non-violent non-cooperation, wherein workers realize the capital worth and collective strength of their labour. Should it succeed, ideas which arise out of narrow acquisitive thinking would vanish because they were rooted in unacceptable and illusory assumptions:

If the trusteeship idea catches, philanthropy, as we know it, will disappear. . . . A trustee has no heir but the public.*

Gradually, statutory trusteeship could be introduced in which the duties of the trustee and the public could be formalized. The trustee may serve so long as the people find his services beneficial. He may even designate his successor, but the people must confirm it. Should the State become involved, the trustee's power of appointment and the State's power of review will strike a balance in which the welfare of the people will be safeguarded.

Fourthly and finally, Gandhi believed that social conditions were ripe for imaginative applications of the principle of trusteeship. The collapse of Western imperialism, the spiritual and social poverty of fascism and totalitarianism, the psychological failure of capitalism, the moral bankruptcy of State socialism and the ideological inflexibility of communism all indicate an ineluctable if gradual movement towards a reconstitution of the social order which will compel some form of redistribution.

IX SOCIALIST ETHICS

The limits to growth make themselves felt through the undermining of social virtues like trust and truthfulness, restraint and mutual acceptance, as well as a sense of fraternal obligation, all of which are essential to individual initiative in a contractual economic system. If such virtues are treated as public goods necessary to universal welfare, then unrestricted individualism faces noticeable limits, lest the social justification and viability of the whole system be destroyed. C.B. Macpherson went so far as

* M.K. Gandhi, "A Question", *Harijan*, Apr. 12, 1942.

to predict that the time will come when it will no longer be feasible to put acquisition ahead of spiritual values, and that national power will become a function not of market power but of moral stature. Although we have to confront scarcity, the emphasis on Hobbesian self-preservation alone is inadequate:

The rich should ponder well as to what is their duty today. They who employ mercenaries to guard their wealth may find those very guardians turning on them. The moneyed classes have got to learn how to fight either with arms or with the weapons of non-violence. . . . I see coming the day of the rule of the poor, whether that rule be through force of arms or of non-violence.*

Even though the war against poverty will take a long time to win, it is necessary for the State to adopt various measures to reduce the sharp economic inequalities that undermine the working of mass democracy, and to strengthen the organizing power of peasants, artisans, and industrial and clerical workers. In addition to fiscal and monetary measures to reduce income ceilings, it would be desirable to assist wealthy landlords and industrialists in parting with portions of their wealth, property and earnings as public contributions towards specific local schemes and plans. The more the redistributive process can be extended beyond legal compulsion and political action, the more democracy is strengthened at the social level. The more the State can bring together representatives of richer and poorer groups, stronger and weaker sections of society, in planning local programs, the better it will be for all.

At this point the socialist's faith as well as his integrity are tested, and so are his ultimate premisses. Does he believe in perfectibility or in original sin? If, like Condorcet, he believes that the historical process and the progress of humanity involve an increasing equality among nations, equality within nations and the perfectibility of man, how much emphasis does he put on human growth and perfectibility rather than on inherent flaws and weaknesses? If committed socialists are not imbued with the idea of atavistic or original sin, if they hold to a truly open view of

* M.K. Gandhi, "Advice to the Rich", *Harijan*, Feb. 1, 1942.

human nature, then they could adopt a different parapolitical standpoint.* They could say that it is because they believe in the unknown possibilities of every human being that they are concerned to extend the idea of human excellence to a point where external social distinctions do not matter, but where trusteeship is honoured wherever it is witnessed in human beings.

Owing to his unshakeable conviction that violence can never produce permanent results, only Gandhi's modesty prevented him from asserting that his ethical solution would come to be seen as the only feasible alternative to wholesale misery and destruction, if not now, then in the foreseeable future. He deliberately avoided elaborating a complete system of statutory or voluntary trusteeship out of the conviction that structural and organizational details necessarily varied with the social and political context and with the personnel, whilst the essential core of the ideal was universally applicable. Thus he could gain a serious hearing from those who would be most affected by the implementation of his proposals without threatening them:

I am not ashamed to own that many capitalists are friendly towards me and do not fear me. They know that I desire to end capitalism almost, if not quite, as much as the most advanced Socialist or even Communist. But our methods differ, our languages differ. My theory of 'trusteeship' is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all theories. †

Looking at Gandhian trusteeship more closely, we might ask what it actually means to be a trustee. *A trustee is one who self-consciously assumes responsibility for upholding, protecting and putting to good use whatever he possesses, acquires or earns.* For an individual to be a trustee in any meaningful sense implies that he is self-governing and morally sensitive. He is acutely aware of the unmet needs of others and simultaneously is capable of controlling and transmuting his own appropriating tendencies. He is deeply committed to cultivating his most generous feelings

* Raghavan Iyer, *Parapolitics — Toward the City of Man*, Oxford University Press (New York, 1979); second edition: Concord Grove Press (Santa Barbara, 1985), p. 89.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Theory of 'Trusteeship'", *Hartian*, Dec. 16, 1939.

and altruistic hopes for others while consciously and patiently freeing himself from all recognized exploitative attitudes and relationships. He strives to become self-regulating, reliable and sacrificial. But he must become so in a courageous and intelligent way. He must learn to think and feel altruistically. He must learn by degrees the heart's etiquette — to speak, touch and act with the utmost purity and solicitousness. He must become, by virtue of self-training, very attentive to every resource at his disposal — both inner and outer. It is precisely because he sees his abilities and possessions as belonging to God, mankind or to future generations that he is eager to use them to the maximum. His posture towards his overall resources is therefore not one of a lazy or selfish indifference. He is not concerned with hoarding nor is he fearful of multiplying his gifts, talents and possessions. Like the good servant in the New Testament, he wishes to increase his meagre "talents", but not for his own sake, nor merely for his own family.

The best trustee is indeed someone who has attained an inward moral balance. He is serenely detached, magnanimous and imaginative. But his detachment is never cold or narrow. It is an expression of his unshakeable confidence in the ontological plenty of Nature and the inexhaustible resourcefulness of Man. His steadfastness and trustworthiness are principally due to this broader focus of concentration. Likewise, his motive is benevolent and self-sustaining because it is not mixed with the turgid waters of personal aggrandizement. Instead, he expresses a quality of love and appreciation for what he has that enhances its moral and practical value for others. He might even possess little, but his sense of when, where and how to use what he has increases its potential good a hundredfold.

If this conveys the invisible grandeur of the Gandhian trustee, then what steps can we take to become more like such sage-like trustees and less like small-minded appropriators? Gandhi might well suggest that our first step should be the fruit of honest self-examination. Grandiose gestures about giving up external possessions and impulsive statements about our good intentions have little practical impact on our character. The initial step should be at the level of thought. We should think clearly and deeply about the principles of trust and trusteeship. What does

trusteeship mean as an idea and as an ideal? What are its practical implications? And what would we have to give up for it to become a potent *mantram* in our lives? This form of reflection and self-questioning initiates a period of mental gestation. It allows us to strengthen our understanding, dispel illusions and light the subtle fire of altruism.

X RENUNCIATION AND NON-POSSESSION

Once we have grasped the principle of trusteeship at a rudimentary level — and recognized its radical implications for our personal lives and impersonal relationships — then we could commit ourselves whole-heartedly to the moral heroism of non-possession (*aparigraha*). Thus moral commitment would be fused with clarity of thought and psychological honesty. Clarity in relation to the ideal of non-possession is vital, as is firmness of resolve. Mentally, we must see where we are going — even though it be only the next step — and we must be unconditional if we hope to approximate the end in view. Otherwise, we will neither overcome nor transform the possessive attitudes that self-examination reveals. This is a fundamental theme in Gandhian thought. We must be courageous and unflinching in our efforts to fulfil our self-adopted vows. Only an unqualified resolve can generate the curve of growth necessary to negate and transcend our appropriating tendencies.

If whole-heartedness or total renunciation is the ideal, we might ask ourselves, do little renunciations count? Yes, so long as they are unconditional. If, for example, I promise myself to return all that I borrow, then this promise is binding in relation to my children, to people I like, to people I dislike, and to those who rarely return what I lend them. This illustrates the principle that non-possession presupposes a change of heart, not merely a change of intellectual viewpoint. To be genuine, the change of heart must come about non-violently through the *tapas* of a self-imposed discipline. This is why Gandhi encourages us to integrate unconditional commitment with both philosophical thought and mature self-honesty.

A second step towards instilling the spirit of trusteeship is taken when we simplify our wants. This is a pivotal point in

Gandhi's concept of non-possession. If we want to make the most deliberate and compassionate use of our individual talents, gifts, faculties and skills; then we need to simplify our desires and wants. Gandhi insisted upon this minimal moral asceticism for the trustee because he saw that unrestrained wants waste our internal capital and channel our resources into selfish uses. Inordinate wants obscure perceptions both of basic needs and deeper human aspirations. They diminish our sense of dignity as self-governing agents and corrode our credibility with others. Furthermore, when the multiplication of possessive desires proceeds far enough, it leads to self-destruction. This is compellingly depicted in Tolstoy's short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" in which a petty landowner is undone by his unchecked desire for land and wealth. He is initially simple and good, but his wish to improve his lot in life is progressively corrupted by a swelling ambition to own and possess more. In the end, Tolstoy answers the question raised in the story's title by wryly stating that the only land we truly need is a grave six feet long by three feet wide.

We might ask ourselves what it means to simplify our wants or needs in a Gandhian manner. It would seem that we can simplify our lives in at least two primary senses. First of all, we can make a concerted effort to reduce the sheer number of encrusted desires and habit-patterns that vitiate our altruistic impulses and fond dreams for others. We self-consciously check the tendency of the aggressive and expansive self to acquire more at the expense of others. But secondly, we take care to do this discriminately. We must, like the smelter and the goldsmith, extract and refine the pure metal from the crude ore. We want not just fewer possessive desires but more benevolent ones. Furthermore, as we cleanse the energy of desire, we purify our imagination. When we gain control over imagination, we establish mind control and render ourselves capable of using all personal, financial and other resources skilfully. We are more earthed, so to speak. With minds unclouded by vain imaginings, we feel more in charge of ourselves and are more responsive to the needs of fellow human beings. Our feeling for what others may attain is gradually enriched, whilst our fantasies about what we hope to acquire wane. We eventually insert our resources into the expanding

circle of human interdependence.

Two other factors contribute crucially to our becoming authentic trustees — *the art of silence* and *the ability to put trust in others*. Silence or speech control is a precondition for all moral and intellectual growth. A trustee must guard his speech if he is to uphold and extend the good. This is not secretiveness but healthy common sense. A trustee's intentions should be as pellucid as crystal and visible to all. But wisdom is needed in all relationships. Hence, a trustee gradually learns not to speak prematurely or out of turn. He fosters a refreshing candour and reserve in speech which enables him to initiate constructive activity in season. He views wise silence and worthy expression as golden keys to maximizing the appropriate use of resources. No one would entrust us with anything precious or worthwhile if we were known to be garrulous, profligate, promiscuous or indiscreet. Nor could we be credible to ourselves and others if our speech is compulsive.

If the ears are the gates of learning and the eyes are the windows of the soul, the tongue is the key to the alchemical transmutation of resources and the freemasonry of beneficial action. It aids mind control and augments true wealth. For example, parents often discern certain admirable qualities in their own children and those of others. These qualities are frequently at a germinal stage. We notice them intuitively but only partially observe them at an empirical level. By a sage-like silence we can help these virtuous traits to grow and luxuriate, and thus become serene and sacred trustees of the good. Without drawing premature attention to what we perceive, we are ready to acknowledge or welcome the child's unfolding abilities when it seems helpful or important to do so. This makes every man and woman a custodian of the good in others. This is a high responsibility assumable by the poorest and most destitute as well as by the wealthy. Whenever any one of us treasures the finest qualities and exemplary contributions of another, we add to the store of human good. This commonwealth grows unseen but yields great benefits to all. Its value is especially apparent when we help someone going through difficult times. To remind someone gently of the best in himself is to remind him of what is most salutary and what is relevant to the moment of death.

Finally, we strengthen our desire to act as trustees for the good when we imaginatively extend our trust and the sacred responsibility for our riches in relation to others. This is integral to Gandhi's idea of trusteeship. But what is the obstacle? According to him, the root of the problem lies in a fearful refusal to relinquish attachments. We often fail to confer equal trust on others or fail to share responsibilities with others because we will not distance ourselves from our suspicions and mental images of them. This is noticeably true with respect to parents faced with granting their own and other children a wider circumference of choice. It seems that a detached love is the only cure because there is no growth unless we expand the circle of opportunity continually and appropriately. This is not always easy, and good results are certainly not automatic. To confer upon the untried or inexperienced that which we have so judiciously cultivated is no simple task. To retire, like the court musicians of Akbar, from the limelight at the right time is a sign of self-mastery, and avoids the sorry humiliation of hanging on to offices and honours. Such renunciation calls for a great deal of thought and a definite degree of risk-taking, but at least the risks are on the side of the potential good in others.

If every man or woman has some innate recognition of the true and the good, enriched by active participation in a theatre of political interaction, then a collectivity of citizens is a mature moral community. It necessarily rests upon and reinforces social sympathy born of self-awareness and a shared consciousness of the species nature — the common humanity and essential similarity of individuals in diverse roles, situations and circumstances. With this wider perspective, it is possible to derive a viable conception of the common good or public welfare from the individual's pursuit of the good in the privileged company of other men and women. This humane pursuit requires a reasoned reflection upon oneself in relation to others and an imaginative empathy with an expanding circle of human fellowship. The germs of noetic change — hidden within the depths of human beings — can become the basis of communities, communes, and conceptions of community at several levels and in concentric circles, in a novel and more intentional sense than any other known in recorded history. They serve as the seeds of a rich

variety of modes of participation in the politics of perfectibility. An ideal community is as utopian as the ideal individual or the ideal relationship. But all human beings are constantly involved in some kind of correction from their external environment, so they engage in criticism of others (often their own way of criticizing and defining themselves). Everyone can see through formal laws and coercive sanctions and recognize constructive alternatives among true friendships, leading to an easier, more natural, and trustful context in which they can free themselves and grow.

If this is what is involved in becoming better and abler trustees, then what concrete implications could trusteeship have in relation to day-to-day matters? In other words, if we wish to embody the quintessential principle of trusteeship more fully, how might it affect our attitude and response towards (1) property, (2) money, (3) time and (4) skills?

Several points should be kept in mind when considering trusteeship and property. In the first place, most of us do not own property, but we all occupy, use and share it. As trustees we should make every effort to look upon all private and communal property with gratitude. We should be grateful for what we have and treat it with respect — whether it be our bodies, our books, or the flowers in public parks and private gardens. This mental posture helps us to divest ourselves of the false modern expectation that there is always more, that everything is replaceable, and that there is always someone else available to tend, fix or clean our material possessions — whether a gardener or a doctor. When we treat all matter with respect, we develop an immense appreciation for those who willingly help in the physical upkeep of our homes and grounds. Those who perform this specialized familial and communal service are thereby less likely to fall prey to an often unarticulated resentment when they see our authentic gratitude and the meticulous care we take with all our possessions and resources.

What could it mean for us to be scrupulous trustees of our money? What attitude and conduct are compatible with the living ideal of trusteeship? Money is a means of meeting certain basic needs, and not an end in itself. We should plan for its proper use so that it fits into the overall purpose and rhythm of our

individual and collective lives. It works best when it is in its proper place, and is not put to mundane and ignoble uses. It must be handled with the same degree of care that we exercise in relation to electricity. Balance is required and so are balance sheets. If we specify suitable uses for our funds — from donations to necessities — they can aid private and collective endeavours. Often our bad habits make it seem that we lack money, and so we seek to earn or grab more. This merely creates an unnatural strain. If, however, we study our spending patterns, tracing them back to their roots, we will frequently find the existence of an unacknowledged trait or hidden desire that needs to be transmuted. As we simplify our wants, establish good patterns and set clear priorities, we generate opportunities to build capital for a higher use. Wealth is not itself the source of vice. Its moral meaning depends entirely upon why we seek it, how we acquire it and whether we beneficently use or pollute it.

Custodianship of time can confront needlessly possessive and demanding attitudes in relation to time. This appears to be especially true in relation to 'open time' or non-compulsory time. It is undoubtedly true of obligatory time as well. When we are at work or performing necessary responsibilities at home, how conscientiously do we use our time? Is it well thought out? Is it properly coordinated? Are we cheerfully open to unexpected needs? Do we somehow manage to dissipate time through several chat sessions a day? More significantly, precisely how high is our level of constant attentiveness? How often does someone have to repeat the same points to us? Time is, to some degree, a function of conscious attention to duty. The more attentive we are, the more we learn and the more helpful we are to others with our time. This is because, paradoxically, the more concerned we are to do our best with and for others, the more we forget ourselves. Our troubles and trials are largely forgotten when we shift our focus of awareness to a higher and more considerate level of human involvement.

How possessive are we about our leisure, limited though it may be? Do we insist that this 'free' time is 'my' time because well earned? We may be quite entitled to what we term our 'private time'; private time is an elementary human need (although not to the *yogi*, for whom time is a continuous inward state called

'living in the eternal'). But, whilst we are entitled to leisure time, we must, as ethical trustees, be willing to utilize it well. Furthermore, our chaste or corrupt visualization and use of free time often tells us something about the colour and direction of our spiritual will. If we use our leisure time constructively, time is a friend and not an enemy — either to us or to others. We work with the critical points within time — called cyclic recurrences — to regenerate ourselves within the spacious transcendental realm of the timeless. If we are wholly unable to use leisure time well, then we sadly diminish ourselves and rapidly subtract from our opportunities to add to the sum of good. *Adharma* inevitably invites destructive karma, "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap".

When we turn to individual skills, we can appreciate the full significance of trusteeship — its subtle power of reconciliation and its ineffable moral beauty. In what sense, we might ask, are our individual skills to be held in sacred trust for others? In what sense can we badly abuse our skills and even use them to exploit others? *The litmus test as to whether or not we are true trustees of our skills lies in our expectations of return for using them.* Our motivation and our expectations are generally interwoven. In the modern West, and increasingly in the modernizing East, skills and specialized knowledge are felt to be convertible into personal success and personal status. We might suppose that we are too mature to fall for the "lure of filthy lucre", the cancer of greed, the canker of soulless competition. However, we are often all too susceptible to self-deception in this regard. We are subject to the satanic temptation that our hard-earned skills should purchase some intangible reward — from spiritual salvation to public praise. If we receive no external acknowledgements, then we are almost certain to be insidiously tempted to retreat into the tortured world of self-pity and self-approbation. This is because the tenuous exercise of borrowed knowledge and routinized skills is inescapably bound up with a fragile and fugitive self-image. Our frail sense of self-regard is disastrously opposed to the Aquarian spirit of effortless renunciation and intelligent sacrifice.

XI SACRIFICIAL ACTION AND SELF-REGENERATION

Through a revolutionary change in attitudes towards consumption, wealth and work, the votary of *sarvodaya* could reverse the rising tide of personal expectations and mitigate the misery of poverty. Gandhi did not believe that the intelligentsia and their theories were capable of raising the lot of the toiling masses; all too often, indeed, the lives of privileged classes and even armchair revolutionaries were based upon cultivated hypocrisy. Gandhi therefore advised political workers to immerse themselves in the Constructive Programme, to engage in "bread labour", and to sacrifice their comforts whole-heartedly in the service of *daridranarayan*, God in the form of the poor.

If only individuals would incarnate the principles of *sarvodaya*, he knew they would find innumerable opportunities for service in the performance of *svadharma*. Anyone may nurture the spirit of *yajna* or sacrifice in their own immediate sphere of obligation. For Gandhi, the path of universal service involves a non-violent socialism devoid of scapegoats and rooted in a sense of mutual trust between all classes of society. *Sarvodaya* or non-violent socialism requires neither inevitable class war nor violent expropriation of property in the name of social welfare. Capitalism, socialism and communism, insisted Gandhi, are alike pervaded by violence and based upon a rigid assumption of human selfishness. He could commend the Marxian ideal of non-possession of property, but he could not accept Marx's narrow interpretations of human life and history. Nor was he willing to accept the proposition that a few revolutionary cadres could enduringly and beneficently transform the social order by politicizing the masses and polarizing them against any set of designated oppressors.

Instead of doctrinal isms or dogmas about historical inevitability, Gandhi addressed himself to the individual integration of precept and practice. He spoke of socialism of the heart and the soul. And he was inwardly sure that the capacity of individuals to contribute to social amelioration is a direct function of their spiritual strength and moral authority, achieved through sacrificial action (*anasakti yoga*):

Even as members of the individual body are equal, so are the members of society. That is socialism. In it the prince and the peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and the employee, are all on the same level. In terms of religion there is no duality in socialism. It is all unity. . . . This socialism is as pure as crystal. It, therefore, requires crystal-like means to achieve it. Impure means result in an impure end.*

Gandhi was deeply concerned with the entrenched tendency of State power to degenerate into active violence, but he was equally concerned lest human beings repudiate their humanity and lose their souls through abdicating individual moral responsibility for the sake of the Leviathan. The onus of responsibility for human life and universal welfare lies with the conscience of individuals, and it is a dangerous delusion to suppose that a human being can relinquish any portion of this responsibility in the name of social contract or legal sovereignty, tacit consent or rule of law. Nor can any moral agent give unconditional consent, for any reason, to the general body of laws, pronouncements and programmes of any political institution. The freedom of the individual to serve universal welfare (*sarvodaya*) must be perpetually preserved in principle against all the claims of State authority. Only thus may society be forever assured of the regenerating influence of truth-force. The ultimate political ideal for Gandhi was

a state of enlightened anarchy in which each person will become his own ruler. He will conduct himself in such a way that his behaviour will not hamper the well-being of his neighbours. In such an ideal state there will be no political institution and therefore no political power.†

Though such a stateless society seems a remote ideal in a world of institutionalized violence, authentic progress along these lines depends upon the private and potent resolves of men and women of courageous compassion and calm determination who search

* M.K. Gandhi, "Who is a Socialist?", *Harijan*, July 13, 1947; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, pp. 591-92.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Enlightened Anarchy — A Political Ideal", *Sarvodaya*, Jan. 1939; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 602.

within themselves for the seeds of wisdom and strength.

Euclid has defined a straight line as having no breadth, but no one has yet succeeded in drawing such a line and no one ever will. Still we can progress in geometry only by postulating such a line. This is true of every ideal. . . . The only way is for those who believe in it to set the example.*

To acknowledge the continual relevance of pioneers such as Gandhi is to awaken the potential for growth in oneself. Once the inward source of strength is touched, the long journey of individual and social regeneration may begin. Faith can repeatedly triumph over fear, never more so than in times of trial.

In practice, our daily approximation to distant ideals will depend upon the extent to which a substantial number of individuals balance their timid concern with individual claims to freedom against a calm willingness to consider the moral claims of the larger community of mankind. Can even the most ingenious organization of industry be dynamized by the innate desire to serve and not merely the desire to be served, the readiness to hold in trust and not the urge to appropriate? Psychologically, the spontaneous commitment to serve a community selflessly may be a self-conscious development, but the primary impulse to serve others is as much rooted in the universal desire for self-expression as the familiar instinct of self-preservation. The noble impulse to serve others, first displayed in the family, could progressively develop into the Bodhisattvic vow to serve the entire community of souls. This rests upon the compelling assumption that as citizens mature into creative individuals, the very process of individuation requires a growing recognition of the just claims of other individuals and of concentric communities, as well as a deepening concern with self-transcendence and the pilgrimage of humanity.

There is indeed no external cure for egotism or pride in what we have accomplished — especially when we strive and hope to see that it has truly benefitted others. It is only through pain and patience that we learn to enjoy giving freely without expectation.

* M.K. Gandhi, "Congress Ministries and *Ahimsa*", *Harijan*, Sept. 15, 1946.

However, if we readily recognize that trusteeship is a form of sacrificial action (*yajna*) natural to man, then it can truly help us to release the exhilarating sense of soul-satisfaction and soul-emancipation taught by the *Isha Upanishad* and exemplified by Gandhi. Our daily sacrifices merge into the mighty stream of *adhiyajna* or cosmic sacrifice. Such ungrudging contributions cannot be measured and meted out in the meagre coinage of thank yous and material rewards. Voluntary sacrifice (*tapas*) releases its own incomparable spiritual elixir. The sacramental yearning to use everything wisely for the greater welfare of our Teachers and for all Humanity could progressively dissolve the noxious sense of 'mine' and 'thine'. The raging fires of rampant greed, insatiable craving and demonic possessiveness could gradually subside because there would be less and less fuel to sustain them. There would then arise, phoenix-like, the incandescent spirit of love and longing for universal welfare, the ceaseless celebration of excellence and promise. Meanwhile, courageous pioneers could light up all over the globe the sacred fires of creativity, altruism and universal fellowship in the common cause of *lokasangraha*, human solidarity and welfare, enlightenment and emancipation.

Many Indian socialists were fervently attracted to Gandhi's political, social and economic aspirations, but they were periodically frustrated by his specific policies, which they saw as strangely anomalous in the twentieth century. Yet, he was a deeply committed socialist and even a communist at heart. His appeal to past experience as well as his openness to thorough social experimentation outstripped the impetuosity of many whose wills were neither so strong nor so one-pointed. He combined rock-like convictions with a resilience and a willingness to learn that gave credibility and credence to his terse utterance nearly six months before he died as a martyred Mahatma:

My life is my message.*

Gandhi knew that his ideas and ideals were difficult to instantiate precisely because of their inherent simplicity. He

* M.K. Gandhi, "Message to Shanti Sena Dal", *The Hindustan Standard*, Sept. 7, 1947; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 609.

recognized, therefore, that he could only clarify and illustrate them to all who sought his counsel. Those others would, through *tapas*, have to assimilate and apply them for themselves. But the hero and villain jostle in every soul. Morally sensitive individuals must learn to detect self-deception with firmness and forbearance, mellowness and maturity. They must come to know the obscuration of light within before they can ferret out evil at its roots. Eventually, "a man with intense spirituality may without speech or gesture touch the hearts of millions who have never seen him and whom he has never seen".* Through meditation, man can attain a noetic plane on which thought becomes the primary and most potent mode of action. Gandhi unwaveringly affirmed that living this conviction would bring sacrificial suffering, as well as an inner joy which cannot be conveyed in words.

XII THE YOGA OF SELFLESS SERVICE

On his seventy-eighth birthday in 1947, when well-wishers showered him with lavish and affectionate greetings, Gandhi thought only of the violence and suffering of his recently independent and hastily partitioned motherland:

I am not vain enough to think that the divine purpose can only be fulfilled through me. It is as likely as not that a fitter instrument will be used to carry it out and that I was good enough to represent a weak nation, not a strong one. May it not be that a man purer, more courageous, more far-seeing, is wanted for the final purpose? Mine must be a state of complete resignation to the Divine Will. . . . If I had the impertinence openly to declare my wish to live 125 years, I must have the humility, under changed circumstances, openly to shed that wish. . . . In that state, I invoke the aid of the all-embracing Power to take me away from this 'vale of tears' rather than make me a helpless witness of the butchery by man become savage, whether he dares to call himself a Mussalman

* M.K. Gandhi in *Young India*, Mar. 22, 1928.

or Hindu or what not. Yet I cry, 'Not my will but Thine alone shall prevail.'*

Gandhi was sometimes apt to speak of God in the language of Christian mystics, despite his explicit commitment to a more philosophical view of Deity, as given in the most advanced Hindu schools of thought and practice. He wavered at times between the standpoints and terminologies of contemplative monists and ecstatic dualists, but he never abandoned his early axiom that Truth is God, which he preferred to the statement that God is Truth, and he also held that Truth is the root of pure love and unconditional compassion.† His lifelong faith in God as Truth (*SAT*) implied a concrete, if inviolable, confidence in the spiritual and ethical potential of all humanity, far surpassing the historicist and immanentist beliefs of reductionist sociological doctrines and rival political ideologies. He could, he felt, honestly call himself a socialist or a communist, although he explicitly repudiated their materialistic assumptions, violent methods, utilitarian programmes and totalistic claims. He spoke of socialism of the heart and invoked the Ishopanishadic injunction to renounce and enjoy the world, which nourished his own reformist aspirations, revolutionary zeal, and Tolstoyan conviction that the Kingdom of God is attainable on earth and is, in any event, a feasible, life-sustaining ideal. He knew, especially in his last decade, moods of pessimism and even moments of despair, when his inner voice would not speak, which lent a poignant and heroic quality to his life reminiscent of the passion of Jesus Christ, the psychological martyrdom of saints, and the early strivings of the wandering monk, Siddhartha Kapilavastu, who became the enlightened Buddha. But he returned always to the conviction that it is presumptuous to deny human perfectibility or the possibility of human progress, let alone to take refuge in the fashionable armchair doctrine that *Ramarajya* is irrelevant to *Kali Yuga*, that the Kingdom of God is wholly unattainable in the world of time.

* M.K. Gandhi in D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, V.K. Jhaveri and D.G. Tendulkar (Bombay, 1951-1954), vol. 8, p. 144 *MPWMG*, vol. 1, pp. 10-11.

† M.K. Gandhi, "Speech at Meeting in Lausanne", Mahadev Desai's Diary (MSS); *MPWMG*, vol. 2, pp. 164-66.

He held firmly to the view which Vinoba Bhave, his leading disciple, made his life-motto, that the social reformer and spiritual anchorite must be committed to the gospel of the *Gita* and to a life of ceaseless, selfless service of the weak and the wretched of the earth. He must choose to become a *satyayugakari*, an exemplar and witness of *Ramarajya* even in the midst of *Kali Yuga*, the Age of Iron. He could thus serve as a heroic pioneer and a patient builder, contributing bricks to the invisible, ideational endeavour to rebuild Solomon's Temple, to re-establish the reign of Truth and Love even in the small circles of human fellowship. As a *karma yogin*, he could yoke a microcosmic approach to social experimentation with a macrocosmic vision of universal peace, human solidarity and a global "civilization of the heart". This requires a staunch refusal to think in terms of nations, tribes, castes and classes, or the tedious distinctions made by the insecure in terms of race and creed, sex and status. What is needed at all times is a purgation of the psyche, a restoration of purity of the heart, and a release of the spiritual will in simple acts consecrated to the good of all. This was strongly stressed by Soren Kierkegaard and Simone Weil. It was powerfully exemplified by many a legendary hero and heroine of the Indian epics and Puranas, extolled in song and story to this day among millions of impoverished but indefatigable peasants in thousands of Indian villages, and also known to the homeless and the dispossessed exiles and tramps in crowded cities and decaying townships.

Towards the close of his extraordinarily eventful life, so crowded with petitioners and visitors of every sort from all over the globe and from the farthest corners of rural India as well as from the towering Himalayas, he reaffirmed his inward vision of the "Himalayas of the plains" and the inextinguishable integrity of socialist *sannyasa* and Bodhisattvic compassion. He ever recalled the formative early influences in his life — the *Vaishnava* ideal of Narasinh Mehta, *The Key to Theosophy* of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and the telling instructions of Bishop Butler, William Salter and Henry Drummond. He evidently knew the vivid encomiums of Drummond to Jesus as the Man of Sorrows, though he never explicitly cited the most memorable of such statements:

Christ sets His followers no tasks. He appoints no hours. He allots no sphere. He Himself simply went about and did good. He did not stop life to do some special thing which should be called religious. His life was His religion. Each day as it came brought round in the ordinary course its natural ministry. Each village along the highway had someone waiting to be helped. His pulpit was the hillside, His congregation a woman at a well. The poor, wherever He met them, were His clients; the sick, as often as He found them, His opportunity. His work was everywhere; His workshop was the world.*

In his *ashrams* and during the periods of abstention from politics, which were longer and more frequent than many imagined, Gandhi was fortunate to experience the secret joy of living in the *atman*, which he early saw in Rajchandra, the jeweller and theodidact. Gandhi's demanding conception of his *svadharma*, his self-chosen obligations, repeatedly thrust him back into the arenas of political conflict and conciliation, as well as into the wider forums of the Constructive Programme, social reform and nation-wide rural reconstruction. Even here his quintessential philosophy of *anasakti yoga*, the gospel of selfless, disinterested action taught by Krishna in the *Gita*, came to his aid in distilling non-violent socialism to its irreducible core, as construed by Henry Drummond:

The most obvious lesson in Christ's teaching is that there is no happiness in having and getting anything, but only in giving. . . . And half the world is on the wrong scent in the pursuit of happiness. They think it consists in having and getting, and in being served by others. It consists in giving and serving others. He that would be great among you, said Christ, let him serve. He that would be happy, let him remember that there is but one way — it is more blessed, it is more happy, to give than to receive. †

* Henry Drummond, "The Ministry of Christ", in *The Jewel in the Lotus*, Raghavan Iyer, ed., Concord Grove Press (Santa Barbara, 1983), p. 201.

† Henry Drummond, "Happiness", *ibid.*, p. 71.

This is the secret of *sarvodaya*, the doctrine of non-violent socialism which Gandhi fused with his alkahest of global trusteeship and his lifelong experience of the reality and continual relevance of radical self-regeneration through selfless service. Krishna's sovereign remedy of *buddhi yoga*, the *yoga* of divine discernment, points to the crucial connection between *viveka*, discrimination, and *vairagya*, detachment, between self-chosen duty and voluntary sacrifice, *dharma* and *yajna*, individual self-conquest and the welfare of the world, *lokasangraha*. Even a little of this practice, as taught in the *Gita* and as realized by Gandhi, is invaluable:

In this path of *yoga* no effort is ever lost, and no harm is ever done. Even a little of this discipline delivers one from great danger.*

In the words of Dnyaneshwar, the foremost saint and poet of Maharashtra, "just as the flame of a lamp, though it looks small, affords extensive light, so this higher wisdom, even in small measure, is deeply precious".

This is the ideal of the suffering servant of Isaiah, the means of entry into the wider human family as shown by Ibn al-'Arabi in his haunting poems, the evocative vision of the monkish revolutionaries known to the Russian Populists, the basis of inspiration of many a Christian socialist and even the Christian Communists of the thirties, the demanding conception of Philo, who concluded from his observation of the Therapeutae and other small communes that "every day is a festival",† let alone the ancient Hindu ideal of the true Mahatma or self-governed Sage, the *jivanmukta* or spiritually free man, for whom each day is like unto a new incarnation, and each incarnation like unto a *manvantara*, the vast epoch of cosmic manifestation.

Gandhi prophesied that for thirty years after his death, his ideas would be largely forgotten, but that, generations later, the *tapas* of millions would bear fruit, and that out of his ashes "a thousand Gandhis will arise".‡ Even though this is still an elusive

* *The Bhagavad Gita*, Raghavan Iyer, ed., p. 79.

† Philo of Alexandria, *The Contemplative Life*, p. 200.

‡ M.K. Gandhi, "Message to Students", *Harijan*, Jan. 16, 1937; *MPWMG*, vol. 1, p. 35.

hope, it is enormously encouraging that courageous pioneers have emerged from the host of the disillusioned who find the world of today too ghastly to contemplate, a world of mindless mass consumerism induced by the rising curve of shallow expectations, a world in which there is a widespread alienation of lonely individuals from disintegrating societies, of conscience from the intellect, of angry rebels from the agonies of the compassionate heart, of impotent politicians from the global imperatives of radical change and genuine coexistence among all nations and peoples, creeds and ideologies. Ragnarok, the end of the gods and of the world, is the sole alternative in Nordic mythology to the rainbow bridge between heaven and earth, Bifrost, at which crossing many may camp at the boundary of a new land, a new frontier, a new settlement. Whether or not a New Jerusalem is attainable on earth in the lifetime of the humanity of the present, there is much wisdom in Gandhi's own well-tested message in times of trial.

In "One Step Enough for Me" he said:

When, thousands of years ago, the battle of Kurukshetra was fought, the doubts which occurred to Arjuna were answered by Shri Krishna in the *Gita*; but that battle of Kurukshetra is going on, will go on, forever within us; the Prince of Yogis, Lord Krishna, the universal *Atman* dwelling in the hearts of us all, will always be there to guide Arjuna, the human soul, and our Godward impulses represented by the Pandavas will always triumph over the demoniac impulses represented by the Kauravas. Till, however, victory is won, we should have faith and let the battle go on, and be patient meanwhile.*

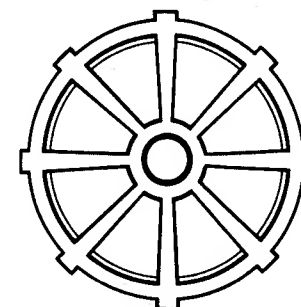
Those who cannot share this testament of faith, rooted in the spiritual convictions of antiquity concerning the periodic descent of Avatars or Divine Redeemers, the immortality of the soul and the inexorable law of Karma, the law of ethical causation and moral retribution, may yet actively respond to "the still, sad music of humanity". After all, even agnostics and atheists,

* M.K. Gandhi, "One Step Enough for Me", Speech at Wardham Ashram, *Navaivan*, Dec. 27, 1925; *MPWMG*, vol. 1, p. 21.

socialists, humanists and communists, may share a living faith in the future of civilization and hold a truly open view of human nature, social solidarity and global progress. All alike may well ponder upon Mahatma Gandhi's life-message. Towards the end of his pilgrimage on earth he delivered a deeply moving and testable challenge to theophilanthropists everywhere:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to *swaraj* [self-rule] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.*

* M.K. Gandhi in D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, vol. 8, p. 89; *MPWMG*, vol. 3, p. 609.





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